



State of Rhode Island

**Department of State | Office of the Secretary of State**

**Nellie M. Gorbea**, *Secretary of State*

July 14, 2020

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr., Chairman  
House Committee on Judiciary  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman Craven:

I am writing in support of House bill 8102 Substitute A that proposes revisions to the emergency mail ballot process, the 20-days prior to an election where voters can cast a vote in person at their local city or town hall using mail ballots. This bill addresses concerns I raised regarding a prior early voting bill that would have limited access for voters to cast ballots in advance of Election Day.

Regarding House bill 8102, Rhode Island voters have increasingly been utilizing this convenient method of voting as evidenced by the 119% increase in emergency mail voters from 2014 to 2018. In the most recent election cycle, more than 10,700 voters cast emergency mail ballots. Even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the volume of emergency mail ballots was straining the election system due to the labor-intensive paper-based process involved. Election officials have continued to raise concerns that the volume of emergency mail ballots in the 2020 election cycle would be overwhelming.

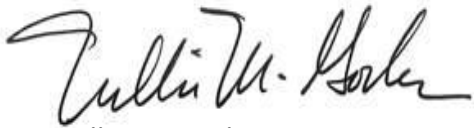
To address these concerns and provide convenient voting options for Rhode Islanders, the Department of State has introduced in-person early voting legislation. House bill 8102 Substitute A incorporates elements of my legislation to streamline the emergency mail ballot process by allowing voters to cast ballots directly into a voting machine in advance of Election Day. This provides for the secure custody of voted ballots and eliminates additional processing by local elections officials.

The bill also streamlines the 20-day voting period in advance of Election Day. This process is similar to those in at least 39 other states and the District of Columbia which allow for in-person early voting without an excuse. This includes 24 states that allow for some period of weekend voting. I will continue to advocate for some form of weekend voting during the early voting period that offers more convenient times to vote to accommodate working families and busy schedules. However, this legislation introduces an early voting process that I have been

advocating for since I took office and I thank Representative Shanley for moving this issue forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of House bill 8102 Substitute A. I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure Rhode Island voters are able to vote safely and securely in September and November.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nellie M. Gorbea". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nellie" being more prominent.

Nellie M. Gorbea  
Secretary of State

cc. House Judiciary Committee members